

# This Isn't Like the Sim at All!



By Lt. Matt Bogue

Many hours of a student's life with the EA-6B FRS are spent in the simulator. After spending much time there and experiencing many situations, I felt comfortable I could handle an emergency when airborne; but I found out on my graduation hop that reality is sometimes different from practice.

After several cancelled attempts at my grad hop, the day finally came. The weather was beautiful, and the low-level route was clear. Plenty of jets were available as spares in the event of a system failure on deck. I was scheduled to fly with the operations officer, who was as eager as I to get the flight done so I could head to the fleet.

We departed Whidbey on runway 25 and began our standard climb-out. As we achieved the minimum air-speed, the pilot began raising the flaps and slats. I noticed the slats moved as usual and appeared to be up, but the IPI indicated a barberpole (unknown or intermediate position). The pilot immediately checked the flaps-slats circuit breaker and confirmed it was popped. We would not be able to lower the flaps normally.

I suggested we try to reset the breaker, and he did. Since multiple resets of a circuit breaker in the EA-6B are not recommended, I was disappointed to learn the breaker had popped again after the reset. I

transmitted to ATC our intentions to troubleshoot over Smith Island and opened my pocket checklist. Although this specific emergency involves a rather cumbersome checklist, I felt comfortable I knew what to do, since only a week before I had been exposed to this exact scenario in the simulator. I began to navigate through the checklist, and we discussed our course of action.

In the simulator, the instructor usually will force the student to step 10 of the checklist. This calls for the pilot to begin lowering the flaps electrically. When the flaps reach the 20-degree position, ECMO 1 must reach between his legs and manually pop the emergency-flaps-motor circuit breaker to stop the flaps in a known configuration. In the simulator, it is easy to identify which breaker should be popped. The purpose of this exercise is to verify that the student is capable of executing a complex checklist.

As the Ops O and I continued through the checklist, it became evident to me he was not as comfortable with the emergency procedure as I was. After all, I was the one who had just practiced this scenario. We took our time, and I refreshed his memory on exactly what needed to be done. This requires a very cooperative effort between the crew to appropriately time the pulling of the circuit breaker.

Before he actuated the emergency flaps, I reached down to place my fingers on the breaker and to get ready to pull. I soon realized how the sim is different from reality. In the sim, I wore only a flight suit. Now I had all my survival gear on. I lowered my seat as far as it would go and still had difficulty reaching it. After loosening my lap belt and removing my gloves, I could reach the breaker. I told the pilot I was ready, and he actuated the flaps. As the flaps reached the 20-degree position, I pulled on the breaker but to no avail. It took several attempts before the breaker finally popped, but it was too late. I had missed the window of opportunity to get the jet in the best landing configuration. We returned and struggled through the landing.

In the simulator, this breaker is popped several times a day as students practice the emergency. It gets loosened by repeated actuation. It is easy to reach because we don't practice with our flight gear and SV-2.

My lesson learned that day was this: A simulator can only approximate reality. There are factors that we often don't consider when practicing. Remember the adage: Train like you fight, fight like you train. I don't advocate suiting up in full gear for every simulator event, but be aware of the differences it will make. 🦅

Lt. Bogue flies with VAQ-131.